

Remarks**Status of this application**

Claims 1-7 are pending. Claims 1-7 were objected to because of informalities contained in claims 1, 4 and 7, and these informalities have been corrected by this amendment. Claims 1, 2 and 7 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Tatham et al. Patent 6,233,177 (hereinafter "Tatham"). Claims 3, 4 and 5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being directed to subject matter deemed to be obvious in view of Tatham in combination with the teaching of Sluiman et al. Patent 6,590,589 (hereinafter "Sluiman"). Claim 6 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being directed to subject matter deemed to be obvious in view of Tatham in combination with the teaching of Helland et al. Patent 6,134,594 (hereinafter "Helland").

This response amends independent claim 1 and its dependent claims 2-7 to more clearly distinguish over the cited art, and adds claims 8-12 to complete the scope of applicants' protection. Reconsideration of the rejection of claims 1-7 based on the prior art is requested for the reasons presented below.

The Prior Art Rejections

The present invention permits a user to create and host a customizable "virtual party" that invited guests may attend at a scheduled time by accessing Web pages that the host customizes for the particular party.

The cited Tatham patent describes a groupware system that permits a primary user to create a virtual, customizable "private office suite" which invited secondary users may employ for collaborative work. Unlike the present invention as claimed, once Tatham's private office suites are created, the invited secondary units may access its facilities at any time and the virtual private office remains operational until the primary user decides there is no longer a requirement for the workgroup. In contrast, applicants' system hosts a virtual party which occurs at a scheduled time or times specified by the host, and the invited guests are advised in advance of the scheduled time or times so that they can interactively communicate with one another at the scheduled time or times in the activities that make up the party.

Claims 1-7 have been amended to more clearly define this aspect of the invention by specifically reciting that the method creates and hosts a customized online gathering of

participants which occurs at a scheduled time, that the server computer stores a specification of a scheduled time or scheduled time range during which the online gathering will occur, and further that an authorized connection is established between the server and each invited user at the scheduled time or during the scheduled time range.

Newly added claim 8 and its dependent claims 9-12 similarly set forth a method of creating and hosting scheduled online gatherings which includes the step of accepting from a host a designation of the time or times when said a specific online gathering is scheduled to occur, transmitting an invitation to participate in the specific online gathering to invited guests prior to the time or times when said specific online gathering is scheduled, the invitation including a specification of the scheduled time or times, and employing a Web server to host the online gathering at the scheduled time or times designated by said host.

None of the cited prior art discloses or suggests such a method. As noted above, Tatham describes the creation and hosting of a "virtual private office" which remains open indefinitely until the primary user decides it's no longer needed. The Sluiman patent, cited by the Examiner for its description of a mechanism for accepting user input to modify template data to create a customized user interface, is unconcerned with the creation of scheduled gatherings. Likewise, the Helland patent, which was cited by the Examiner for its description of servers that act as application service providers, says nothing about scheduled online gatherings.

The Obviousness Rejections

Reconsideration of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) is also requested.

At the Examiner has noted, Schuman discloses a mechanism for accepting instructions from a user for modifying template data to create a customized user interface. Applicants do not suggest that this technique, *per se*, is new. It is submitted, however, that the method of accepting a gathering type designation from the user to automatically create default templates which may be further customized is neither disclosed nor suggested by either Tatham or Schuiman. Moreover, there is nothing in Tatham that would suggest the desirability of creating different standard types of private offices, let alone the need for mechanism for creating customizable default pages to facilitate their creation. Nothing in either reference suggests creating Web pages which implement particular occasion types and themes associated with occasion types. It is accordingly submitted that the proposed combination of references, even if made, would not

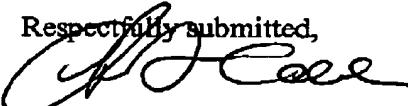
yield the subject matter set forth in claims 3, 4 and 5.

Similarly, with respect to claim 6, there is nothing in either Tatham or in Hellman that suggests that a Web site that implements scheduled virtual gatherings could or should be implemented by an application service provider that makes such gatherings available on a shared-resource basis to other Web sites. Tatham does not suggest that his private offices could or should be implemented using a separate application service provider server, and nothing in Hellman suggests that an application service provider could be used to advantage to implement such an application. Reconsideration of the rejection of claim 6 is accordingly requested for this additional reason.

Conclusion

Reconsideration and allowance of claims 1-7, and allowance of the newly submitted claims 8-12, is requested.

Respectfully submitted,


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Certificate of Mailing under 37 CFR 1.8

I hereby certify that this Amendment is being transmitted via facsimile to the central facsimile number of United States Patent and Trademark Office, (703) 872-9306, on September 27, 2004.

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Signature



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